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ABSTRACT

An important component of vocational assessment for handicapped children from kindergarten through adolescence is the measurement of interests. Direct measurements of interests generally provide inadequate information, because of the linear relationship between expressed interests and personal experiences and language development. In indirect measurement procedures, students' responses to stimuli are grouped into clusters of interests which can be related to specific occupations. Using an interest inventory supplies information that can be integrated with achievement and aptitude data to provide direction for selection of a specific program. Caution must be used in vocational assessment, as the development of interests and skills occurs in a cultural context and is influenced by length of residence in the United States, personal preferences, and English language proficiency. The New York City vocational assessment model is a holistic approach that enables junior high students to set vocational goals, complete an interest inventory, visit area high schools, and perform hands-on activities to allow teacher assessments of skills and abilities. Opportunities are provided to familiarize students with a variety of work environments. (JDD)

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VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

by Irene Strum, Sara Fischer, and Richard Balukas

Vocational assessment consists of evaluating an individual's interests, aptitudes, and achievement (Levinson & Capps, 1985; Shepard & Levinson, 1985). By definition, it demands an interdisciplinary approach, since it is a holistic procedure for helping a student make decisions on future career choices and fields of training. Aptitudes are investigated routinely through the administration of tests like the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children-Revised (WISC-R) (Wechsler, 1974) which has, in addition to a total learning rate or cognitive score, performance and verbal scales and individual subtest and cluster scales; these provide information about spatial thinking, language ability, and, to some extent, manipulative ability. Where appropriate, motor assessments to evaluate fine and gross motor ability also provide aptitude/ability information. Reading and math achievement indicate skills and abilities which are also needed in a vocational assessment.

The only area that may be unfamiliar to the clinician and educator working in psychoeducational assessment is the measurement of interests -- what the student likes to do. Interests are essential in vocational assessment because their analysis provides direction to an adolescent for program and course selection (Mehrens & Lehmann, 1975). Interests are measured directly or indirectly. Direct measurement has been used to support information obtained from indirect measurement. Limited and inadequate information is obtained from direct measurement because of the linear relationship between expressed interests and personal experiences and language development (Johansson, 1980). A student cannot indicate a specific interest if he or she has had little or no personal experience with it or does not have the language to express himself or herself. Most educators are familiar with the answer "I like it" regardless of the question. Moreover, use of the direct methodology of expressed interests does not open up new ideas for the student (Cronbach, 1970). On the other hand, indirect measurement provides the individual almost limitless opportunities since interests which may never be directly expressed may be identified through this approach. In indirect measurement, stimuli are presented to the student to obtain responses which are then grouped into clusters or scales (Harrington & O'Shea, 1982).

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The literature on interest inventories focuses on the works of Roe (1957), Super (1972), Holland (1973), and Kuder (1974) who have provided leadership in the indirect method of measurement. Based upon their research, many interest inventories are available to help students focus on their likes and dislikes. Students' responses are generally compared with others like them and with people who are successful in their career and vocational choices to help make meaningful decisions about the future. Research shows the indirect approach to be valid and reliable (Harrington & O'Snea, 1982; Johansson, 1982). However, Cronbach (1970), in addition to the others, has found that interests do change, particularly among the youngest adolescents. Also, comparing one's interests with unskilled workers will result in inconsistencies since the variety of interests among those in unskilled work settings is broader than among those in more specifically defined careers and vocations. Little data have been collected about the interests of handicapped students, although some interest inventories have been developed for such populations (Becker, 1981).

Most interest inventories result in clusters of interests which can be related to specific occupations and jobs. Usually data are collected on ten to eleven scales which the counselor uses to determine: (1) the level or strength of the interests, (2) the number of interests, and (3) the specific interests. A few inventories result in linking occupations and jobs to the individual student (Cutler, Ferry, Kouk, and Robinett, 1978). For the young and developmentally delayed adolescent, an approach which will assist the student in focusing on his or her interests in order to select high school courses, decide on whether to apply to a vocational high school, or follow a vocational program in a comprehensive academic high school is most appropriate. The information obtained from a broadbased interest inventory can be integrated with aptitude and achievement data to help the student make decisions as to type of high school and specific program. The hierarchical step at which the student enters a specific program may require further assessment; however, data already collected should be reviewed prior to additional assessments. Moreover, curriculum based assessment using a criterion referenced approach may be more meaningful than general ability/aptitude tests which are then linked with specific jobs.

Caution must be observed in vocational assessment just as in other parts of psychoeducational assessment (Shepard & Levinson, 1985). Instruments should have representative norms, acceptable reliability for individual decision making, and validity for the purpose for which the test has been developed and is used. Some tests have been translated into Spanish. Again, cautious use and interpretation must be observed.

Using an interest inventory for most students will result in information that, integrated with achievement and aptitude data, will provide

vocational goals and objectives to meet a student's vocational needs by providing direction for course selection or by indicating need for an introductory exploratory program. Aptitude and ability information for the most part are already available. So-called vocational aptitude tests, including those consisting primarily of work samples, are useful for determining the specific job(s) for which the student may be recommended, but use of such instruments is not necessarily appropriate for diagnosing instructional needs of students entering high school and will probably encourage limiting the number of students with handicapping conditions in programs in which they need to be trained.

LEP and Other Bilingual/Bicultural Students

The development of vocational interests and skills occurs in a cultural context. Goals and expectations result from the interaction between the individual's psychological traits, perceived needs/interests and societal role models, parental expectations, experiential background, community resources, degree of technology, and socioeconomic background (Berry & Dase, 1973).

The experience of bilingual/bicultural students within our culture varies in degree of acculturation, which includes length of residence in this country, personal preferences, and English language proficiency. Furthermore, the closer the native culture is to the American culture, the more similar the life experiences; conversely, the experiences of students coming from a rural area of a non-English speaking country may not only be dissimilar to ours, but also conflicting.

In assessing vocational interests and skills, it is crucial that cultural differences be recognized. Similarity of experiences cannot be assumed. The results of vocational assessment should assist all students including bilingual/bicultural students, in expanding their awareness and experience in vocations. Stereotypes and expectations must be examined. When administering vocational assessment instruments and interpreting results, it is essential to identify that which may be strange to the student, that which may create conflict, and cultural taboos, all of which may interfere with the identification of interests and the appropriate educational recommendations which would normally follow a vocational assessment.

NEW YORK CITY VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT MODEL

This model is a holistic approach that provides ongoing assessment and education to students in special education from their earliest school years through adolescence.

Vocational information appears on every special education student's IEP from kindergarten and, for the most severely and profoundly handicapped students, from five years of age. For young, pre-adolescent students, an annual vocational goal and shortterm behavioral/instructional objective(s) are included in the IEP. When the child becomes an adolescent, more personal, individual information is required to write the vocational goal and short term behavioral/instructional objective(s).

The vocational assessment program begins during the student's pre-articulating year in the intermediate and junior high school. The student is given an opportunity to perform two elementary hands-on activities and fill out an interest inventory. These vocational tasks are administered and scored by the Vocational Task Force, a team of two teachers trained in vocational assessment and career education. Based on the results of the one-day activities with the student, they complete a vocational profile for each student in which recommendations for shop experiences and career/occupational explorations are indicated. Teachers are given assistance in providing vocational/career education instruction to their seventh and eighth grade students. Toward the end of the pre-articulating year, these students get initial instruction on high schools, including visitations.

During September and October of the articulating year, the intermediate and junior high school senior class (eighth and ninth graders) are given a series of lessons on decision-making for high school and a second interest inventory by their classroom teacher. This information, the vocational profile, and other aptitude/achievement data resulting from School Based Support Team (SBST) assessment and teacher reports on skills and abilities form the basis of a structured guided interview by the guidance counselor. The primary purpose of this program is the completion of the high school application; however, it is also one of the initial steps in focusing upon the individual student as an emerging adult by the student, parent(s), and professional educator. This information as well as the specific high school acceptance are used in the annual review for writing new vocational goals and objectives.

During triennial and other re-evaluations, high school students who have not had vocational experiences in shop and other occupational programs, are given such experiences through work samples and other approaches to familiarize them with a variety of work environments and to obtain skill information where gaps exist along with an interest inventory and/or prevocational and vocational curriculum related assessment instrument. This assessment should be implemented by SBST. These results and other aptitude, ability, and achievement data are used to develop annual vocational goals and objectives and to assist the student in making a career choice which will result in additional training and job acquisition.

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